

St. Sergius of Radonezh
Russian Orthodox Church
Chuathbaluk
Alaska *Bethel*

HABS No. AK-90

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. Although built in 1955, St. Sergius of Radonezh displays a traditional form, with a hip-roofed nave flanked by gable-roofed sanctuary and vestibule.

The previous church, constructed in 1891 by Fr. John Orlov, was similar in appearance to the present one, except that it was constructed of logs, and its dimensions were about 1' larger than the present church. The square nave had a pyramidal roof topped by a cupola and onion dome. The vestibule was topped by a gable roof, as was the sanctuary, in all likelihood.

1. Architectural character: Although the pseudo-brick asphalt siding looks dated, the form of the building is timeless, with a hip-roofed nave framed by a gable-roofed sanctuary on the east and a gable-roofed vestibule on the west.

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2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The nave measures 24'-4" x 26'-10", with a 12'-5" x 12'-3" vestibule on the west and a 15'-10" x 14'-6" sanctuary on the east.
2. Foundations: Wood post.
3. Walls: The walls are covered with asphalt siding in a brown brick pattern. The lower 2' of the walls are covered with corrugated metal siding. The building's trim is painted light blue.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood frame.
5. Porches: There is a gable-roofed front porch, with two box columns and a plank stoop and steps. At the entrance on the south side of the vestibule there are a plank stoop and steps.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front doorway has double, paneled doors and plain surrounds. The south side doorway has a single door, with the same panels.
 - b. Windows: The windows have eight-light, fixed sash.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The nave is covered with a hipped roof, while the sanctuary and vestibule have gable roofs. All are covered with corrugated metal.
 - b. Cupolas: Over the nave there is a large cupola supporting an onion dome, and smaller ones over the sanctuary and vestibule. The vestibule roof projects at the peak of the gable to protect a bell.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is one open space, separated from the sanctuary on the east by the iconostas.
2. Stairways: The amvon is raised three steps, and has a projecting semi-circular element in the center and krilos on the sides.

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3. Flooring: The nave floor is covered with linoleum, and the vestibule has a plank floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls of the nave and sanctuary are covered with celotex. The vestibule walls are covered with planks. The nave ceiling is covered with planks, with exposed joists and braces. The vestibule ceiling, also with exposed elements, is covered with beaded boards.
5. Doorways: The double doors between the vestibule and nave are the same model as the exterior doors.
6. Decorative features: The seven-bay iconostas is covered with large oil paintings. The royal doors are ornamented with six round paintings, and topped with an inverted arch. The doors are set in a round-arched doorway.
7. Mechanical equipment: There is a brass chandelier, lit by electricity. Heat is from a wood stove.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church is oriented southeast-northwest, but for the purposes of this report has been described as if it had the traditional east-west orientation. The church sits on a hill above town.
2. Historic landscape design: The churchyard is enclosed by a horizontal plank fence, and the cemetery is located about 50 yards to the northwest.
3. New church: A new church, now under construction, will have the materials of the previous church -- log -- but will be in a rectangular plan with a gable roof.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

The Anchorage Museum of History and Art has a photograph of the previous church, showing its horizontal log construction. B67.23.25.

Fern A. Wallace. The Flame of the Candle. Chilliwack, B.C.: SS. Kyril and Methody Society, 1974. Plate 89 shows this church, but apparently the image has been reversed. Plate 91 is labeled "Aniak," but it too shows the church at Chuathbaluk.

B. Interview:

Sinka Sakar, chief of the traditional council and reader in the church, interviewed by author May 23, 1990.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of St. Sergius of Radonezh Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO
ST. SERGIUS OF RADONEZH RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Chiuathgaluk
Bethel
Alaska

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